

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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International Community Racing to Expand Medical Care in Haiti

U.S. Centers for Disease Control staff join international health teams

By Howard Cincotta, Special Correspondent

Washington – As aftershocks continue to roll through earthquake-ravaged Haiti, Pan American Health Organization officials report progress in providing expanded medical care, while acknowledging that thousands are still in desperate need of care.

More than 50 medical teams from different nations and humanitarian organizations are now providing health services to the Haitian people, along with nine field hospitals equipped to handle surgical patients, according to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

One positive development, says PAHO, is that there have been no outbreaks of communicable diseases to date, although the threat remains. The United Nations says it has been able to increase shipments of drugs and medical supplies within the country.

Another U.S. agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has joined the relief effort and has 16 medical professionals and other specialists in Haiti to begin planning for Haiti's long-term public health needs.

CDC staff members have already joined health teams with PAHO, the Haitian Ministry of Health, U.S. Agency for International Development, and what are known as incident response coordination teams.

The capacity for treating sick and injured Haitians has also increased as a U.S. Navy hospital, the USNS Comfort, anchored off Port au Prince. The Comfort is a 272-meter floating hospital with 12 operating rooms and 1,000 treatment and recovery beds.

In its most recent message, sent via Twitter, the Comfort reported that the ship admitted 63 patients, performed 59 surgeries, and delivered one baby in the last 24 hours.

U.S.-Donated Radios Get the Word Out in Haiti

By Jacquelyn S. Porth, Staff Writer

Washington – Some Haitians, isolated by the ravages of a 7.0-magnitude earthquake, were able to hook up their radios to a car battery or a generator to learn what happened to their country and communities on January 12 and in the days that followed.

But many more were not so lucky. They didn't have radios, batteries or generators. And the earthquake silenced telephone landlines and mobile services, leaving

Haitians in the dark in more ways than one.

It is getting better though. Now U.S. Marines are handing out small radios so Haitians can hear important public service and safety announcements. They can learn when and where precious commodities like food and water will be distributed.

A U.S. Air Force C-130 has been flying in pallets of hand-held emergency radios from Homestead Air Force Base in Florida for earthquake survivors. The radios have the advantage of not needing batteries: they are powered by the sun or can generate power by hand cranking.

The first shipment of radios was distributed in Port-au-Prince nine days after the earthquake hit.

U.S. Marine Corps Sergeant Mark Leuis showed some of the first recipients how easy they are to use.

The U.S. military's Joint Task Force Haiti coordinated with the Préval government to use a special communications aircraft, known as Commando Solo, to broadcast on certain FM and AM frequencies. Messages about the international relief efforts and health information are aired on three frequencies: 92.4 FM, 104.1 FM and 1030 AM.

In addition to the radios, the military is distributing 60,000 stickers advertising the AM/FM frequencies. Sixty thousand fliers that provide operating instructions in Creole and French have been produced.

The specially equipped radios have another advantage: they can be used to charge cell phones and as modest flashlights.

So far, 43,800 radios are in Haiti and another 6,200 are due in country January 25.

The radios are being distributed as part of "Operation Unified Response." The U.S. Southern Command provided the money to buy them.

There are around 6,400 U.S. military personnel supporting the mission by tending to the wounded, providing security at food distribution points, carrying out evacuations or ferrying in humanitarian supplies. That number is expected to grow to as high as 10,000 in the coming weeks.

The military efforts are part of a broad U.S. governmentwide response to Haiti's request for assistance that includes assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development and the departments of Health and Human Services and State.

President Obama said he wanted to be sure that when the United States projects power abroad it is not only to fight a war, but also to “be able to help people in desperate need” because that will aid U.S. national security in the long run.

U.S. to Have Strong Civilian Presence in Afghanistan, Pakistan

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr., Staff Writer

Washington – The United States will maintain a strong civilian presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan long after military forces are withdrawn from the region, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says.

“While our military mission in Afghanistan is not open-ended, we are committed to building lasting partnerships with Afghanistan and Pakistan,” Clinton said January 21 with the release of a new Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy (PDF, 570KB).

The new strategy, which stems from President Obama’s objectives announced in a speech at West Point on December 1, said the core U.S. goal remains to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qaida and eliminate its safe havens in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Obama also announced that he was sending an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan to bolster the efforts of the 68,000 already there, and NATO allies also announced plans to add forces.

In addition, Obama said the United States could begin the withdrawal of military forces in Afghanistan in 2011 if conditions in the country improve to the extent that the additional security can be provided by a revitalized Afghan army and police forces. To support the increase in forces, Obama is expected to request an additional \$33 billion in emergency war funds from Congress when the fiscal year 2011 federal budget is sent to Congress in early February.

While Clinton acknowledged that the challenges in both nations are immense, she said this strategy is shaped politically, economically and diplomatically by those realities. “Far from an exercise in ‘nation building,’ the programs detailed here aim to achieve realistic progress in critical areas,” she added in a prepared statement that accompanied the release of the new strategy.

AFGHANISTAN FOCUS

In Afghanistan, the focus of the U.S. strategy is to build the ability of Afghan institutions – its national and local governments’ ministries and agencies – to diminish the threat posed by the Taliban insurgents and to deliver economic assistance, especially in the farm sector – which would create jobs, reduce the funding the Taliban

receives from illicit poppy cultivation, and draw insurgents off the battlefield, according to the strategy.

“We are focusing our support at the national level on Afghan ministries that can have the most direct impact on service delivery,” the strategy says.

The strategy is directed toward reconstruction and development, improving government, enhancing the rule of law, reintegration of former insurgents who renounce violence, regional diplomacy and communications.

“Aligned with our national security objectives, civilian assistance will help build Afghan capacity in key areas and also reassure Afghans that our commitment is long-term,” the strategy says. “Our civilian effort must be sustained beyond our combat mission so that Afghanistan does not become a failed state and safe haven for al-Qaida.”

The strategy, which was prepared by the Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, says there will be a significant increase in civilian experts to accompany the increased civilian assistance. The number of U.S. civilians in Afghanistan will be tripled from 320 to nearly 1,000 by early 2010. They will come from a broad range of U.S. government agencies including Agriculture, Justice, the FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration, Treasury and Homeland Security.

PAKISTAN ASSISTANCE

Coupled with the enhanced security effort in Afghanistan is additional assistance for Pakistan that includes the Kerry-Lugar-Berman legislation, which authorized \$7.5 billion in U.S. nonmilitary assistance over five years.

Part of the focus in Pakistan is in helping address immediate needs for energy, water and related economic crises; supporting broader economic and democratic reforms; and helping Pakistan build on its ability to eliminate insurgent sanctuaries that threaten the country and the region, according to the strategy.

The United States is taking this “whole-of-government strategy” to protect its vital interests in the region, Clinton said.

“We have no illusions about the challenges ahead of us,” she added. “The Afghan and Pakistani governments have endorsed this strategy and are committed to achieving our shared objectives.”

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